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## Some Recollections of an Interviewer

GETTING an interview, in journalism, is to have a colloquy with one whose views are sought for publication, and simple as it sounds, this isn't always a pleasant or an easy task. Practice may make it so, but it hasn't for me, and I get to an appointment with a notable individual "whose views are

By WILLIS STEELL.

interviewer in such cases is merely a messenger or a link between the speaker and the printer.

It is quite a different matter when one interviews an unwilling subject, who either declines to answer questions or evades them more or less euphemistically. Then it becomes a duel of wits, and the man who has come for a story is obliged to sharpen his.

Here is a little list of persons who didn't like and never meant to be interviewed but who were nevertheless: Ben-

All sorts of noises were resounding in every direction as she moved about inspecting everything with the air of an ingenuite suitable to Francesca, and suddenly there is made a breach in the walls. Francesca's guide hurries her off stage as if to find her a place of safety.

As she passed me I realized that now or never I would get a word with this wonderful woman. I clutched the opportunity with an exclamation picked up from a bootblack. It served to pique her curiosity. The actress stopped and said:

"Italiano?"

"Sì, sì, Signora, poco Italiano" (a little Italian).

The actress smiled.

"Do you like to play in this piece?"

She raised her eyebrows and indicated that at least this act was too noisy.

"And do you like America?"

A shrug and a smile and Mme. Duse passed on to her dressing room.

That constituted the interview, the whole of it. Not worth recording, except for the

note from the interviewer, especially after he had become acclimated in England. He was a popular idol there and dined out constantly, also frequently entertaining in return. Through a friend, who was alternately host and guest, a meeting was arranged between the interviewer and the author of "The Luck of Roaring Camp."

It took place in Mr. Harte's chambers in London and passed in the room he called his library. Except that a big desk, very neatly kept, stood in front of a window, the place resembled rather a drawing room. Bret Harte did not rise from his seat at this desk, but recognized my presence with a very faint nod. He said:

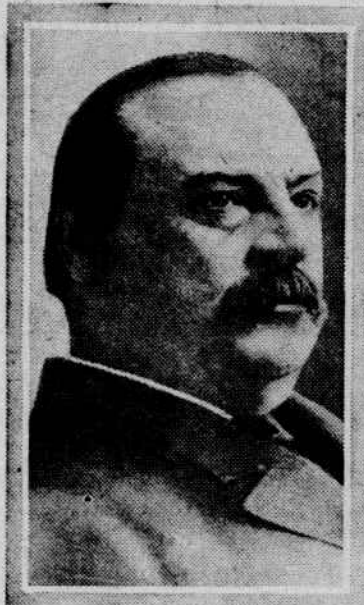
"I understand you have lately arrived from the Continent. That is very interesting, but after all is said England is even more interesting. There is more wealth here and it is solidly invested. I dined last night with an aristocratic family and all the service was of gold. I suppose you have never dined off gold plates?"

"Never," murmured I, abashed.

"It is an interesting experience," said Mr. Harte. "To me it was a novel one, but my host and his family treated it as an every day detail. Gold plates?"

The glitter of those gorgeous plates dimmed every other topic by contrast, but while taking note of Mr. Harte's very sporty attire (his vest, or waistcoat, as he would have preferred to call it, of dark plush, had gold flowers embroidered on it) I did succeed in diverting his mind by asking him to relate the reason for his break with Mark Twain. Mr. Harte smiled languidly.

"It is a well known fact," said he, "that men who like to play jokes on others do not relish one where they are themselves



Grover Cleveland.

sought for publication" with the same sinking heart that fluttered in my breast when as a young reporter so many years ago I went to talk with men famous in their own day and now but memories. Now as then I am alarmed at the possibility of the "great unknown" (to me) declining to say what is expected of him or, having said it, to regret that it was said.

Like the wind "that passeth and cometh not again" seem these interviews of the past, as numerous almost as the unhappy Del Sarto's two hundred pictures, and while in the absence of notes and memoranda of any kind the things they said, important and trivial, may be forgotten, the men themselves are not. I see them distinctly, I hear their voices although powerless to transmit the sight or the sound. But to retell the anecdote, to sketch in the bold lines is not necessarily to scamp the story, for this method has at least the advantage of eliminating the unessentials.

My first big interview was with the Apostolic Delegate to Washington, Cardinal Satolli. He was a little man, frail of body, and these measurements by the eye were accentuated by the simple straight indoor ecclesiastical robe which he wore. Black, of course, and without quality to relieve the fallow skin. The only sharp contrast afforded by his attire wasn't intentional; one could see the line of the white woolen or cotton undergarment rising now and then above the top of his cassock.

He spoke a fluent French and never hesitated for a moment in replying to any question. Indeed, he made opportunities and introduced topics that his guest, fairly ignorant of intransigent questions, would not have thought of, and the interview, in consequence, proved a complete revelation, so far as he wished to reveal it, of the motive of the Vatican in seeking a closer connection with the United States Government.

In fact, Satolli belonged in the category of the interviewed who see the thing as a very satisfactory way of publishing something they wish to "get over." To call this kind of work difficult or requiring a special ability seems to define it badly, for the



Eleonora Duse.

jamin Harrison and Grover Cleveland, former Presidents of the United States; Bret Harte, famous author, and Richard Mansfield, who was too temperamental to push his own publicity, actor though he was. And to this brief list should be added the great Italian actress Eleonora Duse. She figures in the present catalogue, but sticking close to the truth compels me to say that she does so unwittingly.

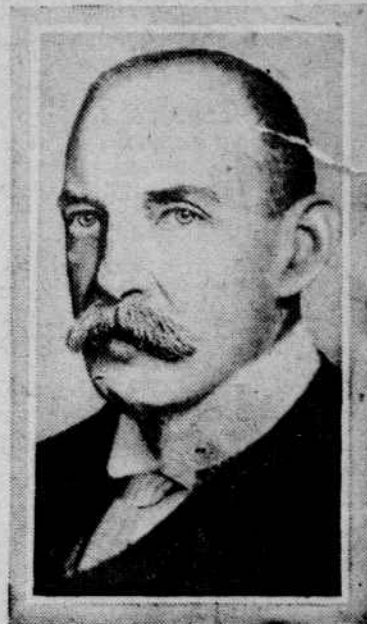
It happened on the stage when Mme. Duse was playing in "Francesca da Rimini" and in the scene where the actress visits the walls of an Italian city in the Middle Ages, when an enemy without was assaulting it with culverin and catapult.



Richard Mansfield.

fact that the interview still remains after all these years the only one ever obtained in America from Mme. Duse.

Bret Harte held himself nearly as re-



F. Marion Crawford.

the victim. Mark Twain was no exception.

"I originated the idea of presenting Mark Twain with a fine meerschaum pipe on an occasion when he was going back East. All the newspaper men and hangers on to literature, of whom I was one in San Francisco, were in the secret, and Twain was touched and delighted when we met him, and after I had made a serious presentation speech gave him the pipe as a token of our regard and esteem.

"It was an ornate pipe extravagantly carved. It lay on a bed of blue velvet and promised to an inveterate pipe smoker like Mark many hours of enjoyment. Evidently he thought so. The rest of us didn't, for we knew that the pipe was carved of soap.

"When our national humorist made the

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